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ABSTRACT

A discussion of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction in the mainstream classroom focuses on teacher training needs to meet the educational needs of limited-English-proficient (LEP) students. After a brief analysis of the teacher's role in relation to the development of all students, and in particular to the language development of LEP students, a teacher development project linking theory and practice is described. A group of teachers met to discuss the diverse needs of this population and visited a school in which students had been exposed to some ESL activities by a visiting specialist. During one school term, teachers created a program of both free and directed classroom activities that promote English language use and student interaction with both peers and teachers, with the objective of providing opportunities to observe student language behavior. Teachers were also provided with pre-reading materials and taught the use of cooperative learning techniques by a specialist. During the following term, the techniques were implemented in the classrooms. As a result, the teachers saw changes in their ability to observe students and reflect on their own teaching practices, invited parent involvement, became more confident, and developed guidelines for supporting each other in effective teaching. (MSE)

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ED 385 120

ESL IN THE MAINSTREAM: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

(Paper presented at TESOL '94 ,28th Annual Convention and Exposition March 8 - 12, Baltimore, Maryland USA)

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ESL IN THE MAINSTREAM: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

The paper is in three parts:

1. Discussion of issues involved in the professional development of classroom teachers who teach a large percentage of students from language backgrounds other than English.

2. Exploration of strategies for identifying the linguistic needs of the students in the mainstream classroom and discussion of ways of observing and recording.

3. Presentation and discussion of a model for developing culturally relevant ways of creating contexts that give meaning to the content being taught whilst facilitating the learning of a second language. Strategies for enhancing the teachers' skills in collaborating with the students and monitoring their English language development are also discussed.

Assumptions

Learning is developmental.

To proceed in learning while coping in the mainstream classroom instructional situation, children need:

i) certain attentional skills that are maturational and related to the functioning of the central nervous system. Some children may be six or seven years of age before they reach the necessary maturational level of these attentional skills,

ii) to be familiar with the classroom discourse and with the school culture.

Child development follows a pattern similar to culture. "However the specific knowledge and skills - the cultural learning - that children acquire at different ages depend on the children's family and the community." (Bowman, 1989,

p.118) This maturation and the development of certain skills can be assisted by perceptive planning of appropriate developmental activities by adults in the children's environment.

The Students

Children entering school will display different levels of development.

Children are likely to be more developed in one skill than another. How the children see themselves and how they relate to others in group activities, will very much influence their capacity to learn.

There needs to be a congruence between child's reality and classroom context for learning to take place.

When I talk about learning I mean the process of risk taking, when the learner is forced to develop new rules or new responses in order to cope. Harste (1984, p.136) suggests that to live within existing rules and predictable patterns is not to grow. It is only under conditions in which all relationships are not known that language users must identify new patterns and relationships and scamper to outgrow their current selves. Wells(1986, p.124) describes learning as the continuous making and remaking of meanings in the lifelong enterprise of constructing a progressively effective mental model of the world in which one lives. It is an essential interactive process.

The point of departure for any classroom program is the conceptualisation of the students' lives, this means their home linguistic and cultural background and the community's language and culture as depicted in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Children who are meant to engage in various tasks in the classroom through English are sometimes at different levels of English language development.

[Insert Chart 1 - Literacy Continuum here]

The teachers

Although the focus of the work is collaborative pedagogy as suggested by Freeman (1989) the long term goal is curriculum change. The mainstreaming of ESL can only be effective if new attitudes to teaching and learning English as a second language can be developed in a cooperative mode and if the staff desire to collaborate to work towards an inclusive curriculum. However teachers' own practices and methods must be the point of departure. Thus the model of professional development designed to support teachers stems from their own theory and their own understandings.

The key to effective teaching is for teachers to be able to relate theory and research to

(i) their own theories of language

(ii) what they know about the students' language and learning styles.

(iii) students' prior knowledge.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

Diagram of teachers' theories (concentric circles)

The way to find out about the students is to observe children's language use in different settings. As patterns emerge, teachers can record them to be able to determine the levels of language proficiency and reflect on these. These will form a basis of comparison with research and with their own understandings. Then they will be in a position to make choices about what to plan in relation to what they have observed and how they refine their own classroom procedures.

As figure 2 illustrates, teachers must make the link between their classroom perspective and research. The outer circle represents the theoretical base teachers operate from when in the classroom, i.e. the teachers' own understandings of how children learn, and their own theories of how first or second language is acquired. Observation, recording, planning - the inner circles - play a critical role in teaching. They are the links between theory and practice. The reflection on practice informs teachers' own theory that they may eventually modify to accommodate their understandings of other theories as they observe and monitor the learning that is taking place in the classroom and plan for their students' further learning.

The challenges

The challenges are

a) to give classroom support to the teachers who have not been trained to teach English to speakers of other languages.

b) to help the learners of English as a second language

i) in the integration of home and school

ii) in their academic learning.

The project described in this paper was informed by Cummins' model of empowerment for minority students (1986); Collier's study about the length of time needed for ESL students to become proficient in a second language (1989); Mohan's work on language in the content areas (1986) and Freeman's model of professional development (1989).

The Possibilities

In the State where I was working from 1990 to 1992 there were very few schools with a high enough concentration of bilingual students for special programs to run; in most schools 3 to 13 students could have been identified as being from a language background other than English out of a population of 300 to 500. In some instances there was no choice but to teach all students in the mainstream classroom. However, in one of the schools where the number of students from a language background other than English was greater than expected, the teachers wanted the students to be withdrawn since they did not feel they had the expertise needed to teach these students in the mainstream.

The specialist teachers for new arrivals expressed concern about withdrawing 5 year olds who had a language other than English from the mainstream classroom. In one school the principal, the new arrivals teacher and the three year one (first year of schooling in some states) teachers met with the ESL Adviser to discuss alternative ways of meeting the needs of the students recently arrived. After numerous meetings the teachers expressed concern that they felt ill-equipped to meet the needs of the students with ' no English' in their classroom. One teacher said she did not feel she was ready to change her approach to teaching at this point in time; she would rather have the students withdrawn.

The meetings continued to be held to give the teachers the opportunity to reflect on their teaching practice and to share their concerns or their successes, but there was no mention of change.

The following year, the ESL adviser offered to help in the classroom three times a week during the language sessions. She worked as a collaborator - an extra pair of hands in the classroom - to work with small heterogeneous groups at various activities selected by the teachers. The adviser stayed for morning tea and chatted about her involvement with the students, shared some anecdotal comments about the students' use of their mother tongue and English during the activities. After two terms, teachers from another school asked if they could have the same type of support,and if they could have another person helping

them in the classroom. At this stage the two schools agreed to plan a seminar to discuss the issues they felt needed to be addressed. They invited the neighbouring school. This formed a natural cluster since their students appeared to have similar characteristics. The seminar was planned, and lecturers in Early Childhood from the local University were invited to support the teachers through workshops and discussion groups.

After the seminar, the other two schools decided to try the program. They visited school one where some developmental activities had been attempted, and the ESL Adviser worked with them during terms 3 and 4. Two schools continued in the cluster, the teachers from the third school did not think they were ready to implement a new program.Each of the two schools involved had two streams of approximately 23 students.

Many of the children had not attended kindergarten and were from a language background other than English. The adviser met with the principals of the schools and with the teachers to plan the project - a developmental program.

The purpose of the developmental program was

- to raise teacher awareness of the different backgrounds and levels of English competence in their classroom
- to provide children who had had a pre-school experience with a natural follow-on from that experience.
- to introduce children who had not attended pre-school to group learning situations in a natural relaxed manner as befitting their stage of development.

As Chaudron (1988) points out, learning takes place in a social context.

* Learners develop in the L2 by producing the target language frequently and in a variety of circumstances.

* Learners develop in the L2 by generating output from others.

* Learners develop in the L2 by engaging in communicative tasks that require negotiation of meaning.

With this in mind, we planned to have structures within which an informal program, with both free and directed activities, would be implemented in an environment rich in varied materials, centres of interest and stimulating activities. The program would introduce children to group learning situations as well as afford them the opportunity to work alone if they chose to do so. The groups would give the teachers the opportunity to observe as well as hear the children and therefore give them a chance to assess how competent the children were in their use of their mother tongue or the English Language and the various skills they would need to participate in activities. Students were able to seek assistance from their peers in their mother tongue if they wished.

Whether the children had mastered the skills and the language related to those particular skills could be demonstrated in the performance of the set tasks.

Sensitive observation and using simple categories helped the teachers determine the children's competence in their use of language.

[Insert Figure 3 here]

Teachers need ways of assessing language that will help them monitor the children's growing ability to use language skilfully in their social milieu. Test scores may be part of the assessment but teachers' judgements of language ability are still the most trusted and reliable assessment. Observing and recording children's language behaviour is a viable way of looking at what they can do, thus giving an effective starting point for instruction.

The important thing is that teachers need to think carefully about the social interaction that is going on in and out of the classroom, perhaps by asking themselves questions such as:

1 Does each child use language for a variety of purposes? How is the language use linked with what the child is doing? Who is the child talking to?

2 What range of each child's language use does the teacher hear in the classroom? What situations promote different uses of language?

3 How can the teacher extend children's language use while they are working in both groups and alone?

4 What access do the children have to the English language or to other languages at home or at school?

Teachers were provided with pre-reading materials. The adviser visited the schools once a week and worked with the classroom teachers to assist them in working with cooperative learning groups. The ESL teacher worked alongside teachers using the teachers' resources e.g., a shopping game for labelling was transformed into an activity that required student-student interaction and appropriate cognitive level of engagement. The game was used to establish what knowledge structure, thinking skills students would need to be able to perform the task and what key visuals could be used to support their language development. (Mohan 1986)

The shopping game turned into the following:

Knowledge structure	Thinking skills	Key visuals	Language demands
Classification	Classify, define understand, apply	Web tree table	Appropriate lexical items & connectives

Teachers were encouraged to try to collaborate and to plan according to this format.

The teachers were also given the opportunity to visit a school that was running a developmental program. The visit was followed by discussions with the classroom teachers, the principals and the ESL teachers. Cluster meetings continued to be held once a term. At these meetings teachers shared their concerns, their ideas and their successful activities and planned to try out some of the developmental activities in their own classroom. They also decided that they would pay particular attention to planning so as to integrate language and subject areas, taking into account skills, children's abilities, the nature of the subject to be integrated and the reading resources required to support the language development of the children.

The fourth term was an implementation phase. No new ideas or resources were introduced. Attempts were made to:

i) work with small groups with the help of parents and the support of the ESL teacher

ii) plan around real situations that were congruent with the children's cultural and linguistic experiences.

Towards the end of the year a questionnaire was sent to the teachers who had participated in the project. Their responses indicate that:

- they have started to become observers of their students

'-it is easy to detect where the children are at

-made me more aware of the abilities of each child since they stand out more in small groups

-more individual attention can be given

- they are reflecting on their teaching

- with the right activities, grouping allows children to explore, and question without teacher domination of the learning environment

- made me want to plan for less teacher directed activities

- with the right activities children have more chance to develop oral language

(Summary of teachers' responses in Appendix 1)

Conclusion

___ A summary of the stages of the project

Stage	Data	Professional development
1990 February Term 1 First request	-discussions -observe & document needs	-discuss teachers' perception of the situation & their needs
Term 2 April	-interview -document visit to school running a developmental program; -document cluster meeting	-discuss teachers' needs with principal and teachers -formation of cluster to reflect on visit; -identify professional development needs & plan a professional development program; -plan nature of classroom support needed
May Term 3 & 4	-documentation of seminar	-input by experts
October	-Interviews; -observations -questionnaire	-classroom support by ESL adviser or colleague; -reflect on teaching -collaborative planning of language sessions.
November	-document cluster meeting	-reflect on achievements so far
December	-discussions	-negotiation of professional development & nature of classroom support
1991 Term 1	-discussions -interviews -record of comments on team teaching	-collaborative planning; -start team teaching(tentative)
Term 2	-document cluster meeting & slip writing	-adviser as colleague in the classroom. -collaborative planning & Team teaching
Term 3 October	-document seminar on early childhood & developmental learning	-learn to document language development -continue team teaching

Term 4	-interviews on benefits of support, -time for reflection & for planning; -records of visits to kinder garten	-planning for language development & for documenting students' progress -time for reflection and sharing
1992 Term 1	-document teachers' meeting; -interviews, -cluster meeting	-collaborative planning; -peer support;

Documentation of cluster meeting

Slip writing session

Examples of teachers' questions and comments:

- How can we work towards more effective cooperative planning - using all the experts in the school?

- *Make time! What is important is worth allocating time for. Get support from the principal and it will/could happen.*

- What is the place of a developmental program in the overall curriculum?

- ***Central!***

- How would you introduce a developmental program to a school where group work is not part of the school philosophy?

- *Start by yourself and share the good experiences with others.*

- What do you say to a fellow teacher who believes that children come to school with all the concepts and understandings needed for Year One?

- *That children come from varied background and experiences.*

- Difficulties with monitoring the progress of students!

- *Yes! Yes! Yes!*

I found that a passive learner, a Vietnamese child, is interested in the developmental program!

- *This is what we need!*

- I wish that many more teachers/schools would make a leap in thinking towards doing more about what children need and how they learn!

- *AGREED! massive changes of attitudes are needed in the whole school community, teachers and parents!*

The aim of this project was to assist the mainstream teachers to become aware of the needs of ESL students, to develop in them a desire to reflect on their own teaching, to experiment with new approaches and to believe in themselves and in their students.

To achieve this aim the teachers were given the opportunity to meet, reflect upon and share their own practice; they had access to experts, they were encouraged to verbalise their concerns and their experiences. Through this process the teachers developed a meta-language for their teaching practices and through feedback from their peers they started to become aware of their own talents and their limitations, they displayed an objectivity about their own teaching and began to believe in themselves as professionals.

The last cluster meeting was attended by the teachers from the schools that participated in the project and the staff from a neighbouring school.

The teachers reported that they:

-had developed a process to record successful activities

-attempted to plan their classroom activity on the planning format shared at one of the cluster meetings but they adapted it to suit their own style.

They had sent letters home to explain the developmental program and to invite the parents to participate in the group activities in the classroom.

They felt that they were becoming more sensitive to the language background of the students and felt that they were now hearing more of the language the students were using during the activities.

The teachers felt that they had gained a sense of unity with other teachers in the cluster as they exchanged ideas with colleagues. They felt much more able to influence what was happening in their classroom and to give direction to their professional growth.

They developed the four Cs for themselves and their colleagues to remind each other of the processes involved in professional development and of the possible outcomes.

Care for and collaborate with colleagues and students

Create a learning environment in the classroom and in every situation

Celebrate learning

Challenge colleagues to become risk takers and to dare to change

The teachers agreed to develop a personal action plan and to set goals that they would discuss during future cluster meetings.(Appendix 2).

The outcome was along the following continuum:

TEACHER	STUDENT
• review of theory • collaboration • reflective teaching • planning • cooperative learning strategies • observation skills	• knowledge/experience • collaboration • development of skills, competencies for classroom tasks • independent learner • competent user of the language

These are what would be achieved eventually, recognising that both teachers and students would be somewhere along this continuum after having collaborated over a period of time

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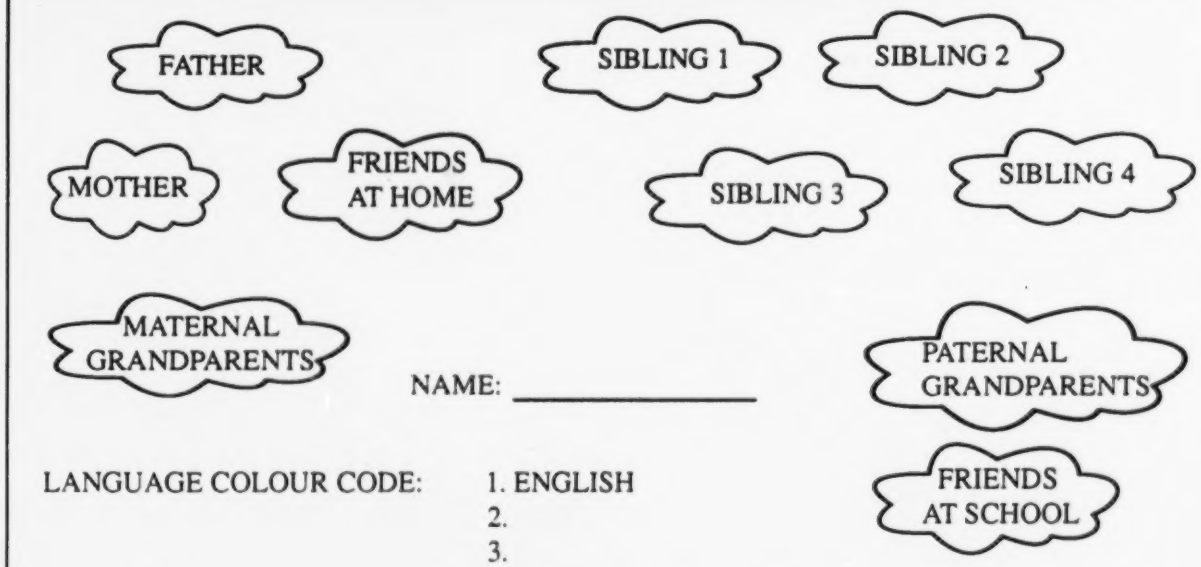
Survey form for students with a NESB background



LANGUAGE DOMAINS: (Use Colour Code)		Mother	Father	Siblings	Maternal G/Parents	Paternal G/Parents	Friends at home	Friends at school
1.	Home Conversations							
2.	Shopping (Supermarket)							
3.	Visitors							
4.	Shopping							
5.	Social Function - Relatives							
6.	Social Function - Community							
7.	Telephone							
8.	School Meetings							
9.	After Mass							
10.	Sport							

USE OF MOTHER TONGUE: (CHILD'S OPINION)

Travel Overseas: No/Yes

Reads: No/Yes Writes: No/Yes

Figure 3

LINGUISTIC PROFILE

The linguistic profile of the students is a starting point for teaching the students from language backgrounds other than English.

Individual data on the students' language use identifies the needs of the students for example, do they understand English even though they do not use it at school?

In what situations do they use their mother tongue or English? and to whom?

This profile will help the teacher to find out whether students have already had access to some English and in what domain.

The information will be useful for planning appropriate English programmes.